Claims Under Scrutiny

Investigations, trials, and hearings during the Cold War

USH.C.6.2.C "Describe the Army-McCarthy hearings and examine controversies related to Alger Hiss and the Rosenberg spy trials, explaining the role of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the House Committee on Un-American Activities."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one accusation and one outcome in each paragraph. Circle mentions of the FBI, HUAC, and the Senate subcommittee to track which group did what.

Three Cold War Controversies

1. In 1948, former Soviet courier Whittaker Chambers told the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) that former State Department official Alger Hiss had passed him government documents in the 1930s. Hiss denied spying and said Chambers was lying. HUAC, a congressional committee, questioned both men in public; the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), a law enforcement agency, investigated and gathered evidence. Documents Chambers produced intensified the dispute, but prosecutors could not charge Hiss with espionage because the legal time limit had expired. In 1950, a jury convicted Hiss of perjury for lying under oath about his dealings with Chambers, not of espionage.

2. The FBI also investigated a Soviet spy network that led to the arrests of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in 1950. At their 1951 trial, prosecutors accused the couple of conspiring to pass atomic secrets to the Soviet Union; witnesses, including Ethel's brother David Greenglass, testified against them. A jury convicted both of conspiracy to commit espionage, and they were executed in 1953. Later evidence strongly supported Julius's involvement in spying, while Ethel's exact role remains debated. Critics also question whether the trial testimony and death sentences were fair. HUAC did not conduct their criminal trial; a federal court did.

3. The Army-McCarthy hearings of 1954 took place before a Senate subcommittee, not HUAC or a criminal court. Senator Joseph McCarthy claimed the Army had failed to remove suspected communists; Army officials charged that McCarthy's staff sought special treatment for a former aide, G. David Schine, who had been drafted. Television viewers watched lawyers question witnesses and challenge the claims. Army lawyer Joseph Welch rebuked McCarthy's attacks on a colleague, asking, “Have you no sense of decency?” The hearings exposed McCarthy's tactics to a national audience. Later that year, the Senate censured him; the hearings themselves were not a spy trial.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the roles of HUAC and the FBI differ in the Hiss controversy, and what was Hiss convicted of?

2. What evidence and outcome does the passage describe in the Rosenberg case, and what remains debated?

3. Why would it be inaccurate to say that HUAC tried the Rosenbergs? Include the FBI's role in your answer.

4. What did each side allege in the Army-McCarthy hearings, and how did their outcome differ from a spy trial?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a museum label of 75 to 100 words comparing one spy case in the passage with the Army-McCarthy hearings. Explain what the FBI or HUAC did in the case, who held the hearings, how their outcomes differed, and one question that remains about evidence or fairness.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · USH.C.6.2.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one accusation and one outcome in each paragraph. Circle mentions of the FBI, HUAC, and the Senate subcommittee to track which group did what. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the roles of HUAC and the FBI differ in the Hiss controversy, and what was Hiss convicted of?	**HUAC publicly questioned Hiss and Chambers; the FBI investigated and gathered evidence. Hiss was convicted of perjury, not espionage.**
2	What evidence and outcome does the passage describe in the Rosenberg case, and what remains debated?	**Trial witnesses testified against the Rosenbergs, and later evidence strongly supported Julius's involvement in spying. Both were convicted of conspiracy to commit espionage and executed; Ethel's exact role remains debated.**
3	Why would it be inaccurate to say that HUAC tried the Rosenbergs? Include the FBI's role in your answer.	**The FBI investigated the spy network connected to their arrests, but a federal court conducted their criminal trial. HUAC did not try them.**
4	What did each side allege in the Army-McCarthy hearings, and how did their outcome differ from a spy trial?	**McCarthy alleged that the Army had failed to remove suspected communists. Army officials alleged that his staff sought special treatment for Schine. A Senate subcommittee held the hearings, and the Senate later censured McCarthy; the hearings were not a criminal trial.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A conviction and a televised hearing had different stakes. The FBI investigated the spy network tied to Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, but a federal court, not HUAC, tried them. Both were convicted of conspiring to commit espionage and executed. Later evidence strengthened the case against Julius, while Ethel's exact role remains disputed. In the Army-McCarthy hearings, a Senate subcommittee heard accusations about communists in the Army and pressure for special treatment. Television viewers saw McCarthy's tactics, and the Senate later censured him rather than convicting him of a crime. How much did disputed testimony affect the judgment of Ethel's guilt?

Accept either spy case in the museum label. Check that students distinguish FBI investigations, HUAC's congressional hearings, federal criminal trials, and the Senate's Army-McCarthy hearings.